Collected Poems

MARTIN LINGS

Martin Lings was born in Burnage, Lancashire, in 1909. After a classical education he read English at Oxford where he was a pupil and later a close friend of C. S. Lewis. In 1935 he went to Lithuania where he lectured on Anglo-Saxon and Middle English at the University of Kaunas. After four years he went to Egypt and was given a lectureship in English Literature at Cairo University where he lectured mainly on Shakespeare. In 1952 he returned to England and took a degree in Arabic at London University. In 1955 he joined the staff of the British Museum where from 1970–73 he was Keeper of Oriental Manuscripts. For the following year he held the same post in the newly founded British Library. His chief publications are listed in this volume. He is also the author of the chapter 'Mystical Poetry' in *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, which is Volume 2 of *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, and the chapter on 'The Nature and Origin of Sufism' in Vol.19 of *World Spirituality*, as well as articles for *Studies in Comparative Religion*, *Sophia*, *The New Encyclopaedia of Islam* and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

In his first book on Sufism, written many years ago, Martin Lings wrote, with reference to the Quranic descriptions of the celestial Gardens: 'To speak of the Gardens and Fountains of Paradise, as also of its Rivers, Fruits and Consorts, is to speak the Truth, whereas to speak of such blessings in this world is only a manner of speaking, for the Realities are in Heaven and what we see here-below are only the remote shadows of Reality.' He adds: 'The shadow returns to the Substance and, for those with eyes to see, the best things of this world—and that is the criterion of their excellence—are already as it were winged for return to their celestial Source. It is the function of art, in portraying earthly objects, to portray mysteriously at the same time something of their "wings".' We take this as the author's avowal of an intention which lies behind his poems.

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Revised and Augmented

By Martin Lings

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SUMMITS OF ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY
AND ILLUMINATION

COLLECTED POEMS

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Martin Lings

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To the memory
of
Adrian Hugh Paterson

PREFACE

THIS new edition of Martin Lings's *Collected Poems* contains three that are published here for the first time: one of these, 'Self-Portrait', is the longest of his later poems.

Perennial Books, the only previous publisher of his poetry, no longer exists, and the poet himself has retained no copies of reviews. But in a posthumous publication of letters of C. S. Lewis there is one which begins: 'I wish you could meet my two new pupils Lings and Paterson'.[1] Lewis goes on to say that one great advantage of his profession lies in its being sometimes conducive to making real friends. He then describes, not without humour, these two new friends, stressing the fact that they are both poets, while admitting a certain preference for Lings both as a poet and as a man. The date of the letter shows it to have been written before any of the contents of this volume. But in answer to our questions Martin Lings tells us that he had remained in close contact with Lewis until 1937, sometimes going to stay with him at his house in Headington for a week on end. He added: 'I was always one of the first readers of Lewis's poems that were written at this time (those which are contained in *The Pilgrim's Regress*), while he and Adrian Paterson were always the first to read mine. Lewis liked my early sonnets, especially 'The Muse'; and of 'The Birds' he wrote: "The sestet[2] is sheer inspiration". The later poems were all written after his death except for 'The Garden' of which I sent him a copy. I was living in Egypt at that time. I cannot find his response, but I remember its opening: "What a great pleasure it was to receive once again a poem from your hand—and a good one!". Then he mentioned in particular the stanza about water which he found "most moving"'.

Martin Lings also tells us that he had one or two very appreciative letters from the late Bernard Groom, author of *The Diction of Poetry from Spenser to Bridges* and *The Unity of Wordsworth's Poetry*, who wrote to him, 'I could not have believed it possible that the poems of a

1 *They Stand Together: the letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves* 1914–1963, edited by Walter Hooper (Collins, 1979) pp. 433–4.
2 The last six lines.

new unknown English poet could ever give me so much pleasure as yours do'.

We will now quote the editor's preface to the first edition:

> The author was against having any introduction to his collected poems. But we have none the less persuaded him to allow us to reprint here, in a shortened and slightly modified form, the preface he wrote for his first published volume of poems, *The Elements.*
>
> The first two poems in this volume were the first to be written, but it is the second one, the narrative, which is the earlier of the two. The other is here put first because it is in the nature of a preface. But prefaces are written last of all, and this sonnet, 'The Muse', written when I was twenty-three, was in fact the last of a series, none of which, alas, with these two exceptions, are worth publishing.
>
> The Muse is not just a poetical conceit; she is a reality, and all art worthy of the name is still as dependent upon its own particular Muse as it always has been and always will be. By 'Muse' I mean one of the aspects, symbolically nine, of the beauty of Apollo; and by 'Apollo' I mean – or rather let me quote what I have said elsewhere:
>
> 'For Shakespeare and for Dante, just as for the ancient priests and priestesses at Delphi, Apollo is not the god of light but the Light of God.'[2]
>
> It took me some time to find this out. When I wrote my prefatory sonnet, I already knew that the Muse was a reality.
>
> But when I came to understand more clearly the nature of that reality and therefore of the 'pledge' and the 'prayer' that I had made, it dried up the ink on my pen. The rule of *noblesse oblige* has a negative as well as a positive significance, and there are some things which cannot be learned with impunity. If I had been content just to remain at the outskirts, it might have been different. But I had prayed for no less than to enter the Garden; and I had learned, as it were in answer to my prayer, that the only way to it lies along a path of the kind that is traced out by Dante in his *Inferno* and *Purgatorio.*

2 *The Secret of Shakespeare* (Quinta Essentia, 1996) p. 10.

Nor can one enter for the sake of writing poetry, but only for the sake of the Garden itself and what lies beyond.

My new found knowledge had thus given me imperative things to do which were incomparably more important than writing;[1] and even though I could dimly foresee that the need to put pen to paper would come again, the future seemed blank as regards poetry. Prose would almost certainly be the right medium to express what had to be said. But this was not what I desired, nor could it really be a substitute or a consolation.

In the way that it is produced, poetry is far more deeply akin to the other arts, despite the difference of medium, than it is to didactic or other prose writing. Keats said: 'Poetry should come as naturally as the leaves come to a tree, or it should not come at all.' By this he meant that true poetry comes out of the very substance of the poet as the leaves come from the substance of the tree or as the spider's web comes from the spider's own body. He could have said, with exactly the same meaning: Poetry is not written with ink but with the heart's blood. But to revert to his simile, the leaves cannot come to a tree until the sap rises; and for the sap to rise, certain conditions are necessary.

In a word, I came to realize that for myself a long Winter had set in, perhaps for the rest of my life. I even came almost to forget that although I could not go to the Muse, it was still just as possible as ever for her to come to me. But although my poetical ambition had been absorbed into a higher ambition, the only one worth having, this did not mean that I could change my nature, and the urge to write poetry was too much part of that to be rooted up and thrown away. It had therefore to remain where it was, partly dormant but not seldom reminding me of its existence.

And so in my late twenties, after the age of twenty-seven, I wrote no poetry; and all through my thirties I wrote none. But if the Muse so wills, she can suddenly change Winter into Spring, if only for a few hours or days; and when I was forty-two, just

1 Adrian Paterson, who had then barely four more years to live, had also reached the same decisions as myself, for the same reasons.

after a spiritual retreat, I was able to write the first of what I have called here the 'later poems'. The garden of its theme was in Egypt, and the line that serves as refrain is the translation of an Islamic prayer.

I fondly imagined that this was a fresh beginning. But scarcely had the Muse come than she was gone, and I had to wait almost as long again as the first wait. The rest of my forties ran out, and the first half of my fifties. Then, at the beginning of May in 1964, there came the second of the later poems, to be followed, over the years, by others.

The author has asked us to take the opportunity, offered by our preface, of pointing out that some of the later poems, in particular 'Midsummer', 'The Elements' and 'The Heralds', have been considerably revised since their first publication.

*

Early Poems
1932–1936

*

THE MUSE

When she approaches, her immortal presence wakes me
To feel unearthly motion made upon the air,
And like an aspen to reveal it : she is there,
Come, gone, elusive as the wind – thus she forsakes me.
Yet following after with my voice, I give her these,
Which I have written in my youth, upon the edge
Of man's affairs, and make beyond recall the pledge
To pour my strength out in her service to the lees.

Many have sought what now I seek, and few have won;
Yet not the less I am driven to pray : pause in thy fleeing
While I have breath; and call to me, and lead me on
Into that garden where the Muses sing and dance,
That I may fill mine ears with sound, mine eyes with seeing,
And make for men some deep enduring utterance.

THE LEGEND OF SEYIS AND HALCYON

King Seyis was at sea, his boat
Far from the shore, when a storm smote
The deep, and from its tranquil plain
Grey foaming hills the hurricane
Piled up, and chasms between them ploughed,
And lightning flared in the gloom, and loud
Rolled the thunder to crash in fury
Above the vessel. On deck the hoary
Waters eddied and swirled shin-high,
And Seyis, knowing he must die,
Prayed: 'O that Halcyon my wife
May know that I have lost my life,
Or she will pine amid despair
And hope, kneeling in fruitless prayer
To save from death a man long dead.
I ask that she may know instead
The certain truth, though bitter it be.
And for myself, since the wide sea
My tomb is, since no passers-by
It can remind that here I lie –
For words on water who can grave,
Bidding men pray, my soul to save? –
And since I am to die unshriven,
O thou, who art the Queen of Heaven,
Pray for my soul, and that will be
More than if all men prayed for me.'
The Queen, in answer to his prayer,
Sent Iris, her winged Messenger,
Whose robes are woven of rainbow light.
She flew her many-coloured flight,
Down to the tumult of the sea

And from his body she set free
With ease his soul, which she imbued
With Heaven's purpose. Mid pale-hued
And luminous fish he passed, o'er stones,
Timbers from wrecks, and mortal bones,
Bedded in shifting sands, where wallow
Sea serpents, then through caverns hollow
That to their dome the ocean fills,
And rich roots of gold-hoarding hills,
Till out he came upon a deep
Thick wooded slope, and down the steep
He drifted, many fathoms more
Than lowest level of ocean floor,
To where Sleep dwells in the valley's bed.
And here his phantom presence shed
A lustrous pallor through the gloom,
Revealing poppies in full bloom,
And herbs, potent in leaf or root
For drugs, and the faint glow of fruit
Amid the sombre boughs half hiding.
No winged ones, chattering and chiding,
Come here, nor beasts that cough and grunt,
Nor anything that might affront
Immortal Sleep; but gentle calling
Of dove to dove, and far off falling
Of waters, and the sigh of trees
At touch of wind, and murmuring bees,
Are welcome, for could silence sound
Such were its voice. A youth he found
Deep sunken in a bed of moss
That swelled about him. Morpheus it was,
The son of Sleep, the prince of dreams,
Who, troubled by the unwonted gleams,
Unclosed an eye, and sighed, and shifted,

And sighed again, and slowly lifted
Himself to sit in his mossy bed.
'I am the ghost of Seyis dead.
Give me a dream, that I may wear
The shape that pleaseth me, and fare
Whither I will, and at what speed.'
The prince reached upward, and he freed
A gossamer hanging from a yew,
Which cloakwise on the ghost he threw,
And drooped once more to couch his head;
And Seyis stood by his wife's bed,
Ivory pale, with salt sand flecked,
With living shells and weeds bedecked,
While from his hair and from his beard
Dripped water, and his robe, sea-smeared
And sodden, about his ankles clung,
And water from his shoon was wrung.
'Love, for my safety pray no more:
My sails no watcher from the shore
Will ever sight. Yet do not weep,
For I, that come to thee in sleep,
Deathless soul am of body dead.
The Queen of Heaven to thy bed
Hath sent me, and she biddeth thee
Go at daybreak and by the sea
Search for my body. At thy side
I will be present, an unseen guide.'
She found him at the water's brim
And waded out, and gathered him
Fast in her arms; and then in awe
And wonder her attendants saw,
From where they stood far off, a cloud
Of many colours descend and shroud
Those two on whom their eyes were bent,

For the Queen of Heaven had sent
To fetch them to her, that they both
The Waters of Immortal Youth
Might drink, and ever dwell with her
In Paradise. Her messenger
She bade leave in their wake a sign
That Halcyon's soothsayer might divine
Their heavenly state : the people sought her,
And there they found upon the water
Two birds most beautiful in the stead
Of their queen alive and their king dead,
Fluttering their wings in blissful dance;
And it is said that Heaven still grants
High favour to the halcyons,
And many daughters and many sons
Now dwell with them upon the foam,
And when they build each year their home
Near to the shore, the Queen makes still
The waves, and guards them against all ill.
Thus they are loved by voyaging men,
And held in reverence, for when
They fly and swim and dance together
About their nest, they make fair weather.

THE SOUTH WIND

A breath: and in the height of heaven leisurely follows
Cloud upon cloud, and on the earth there has begun
A waking and a whispering, as ripples run
Over the green grass and the water of field shallows;
And flowers are wide open in the unsunned hollows
Of dells, and every leaf-bud swells, and to the sun
Butterflies come forth at thy touch, invisible one,
Bringer of storks, the cuckoo, and the swifts and swallows.

Blow on, and let thy warm waves bountifully sweep
Upon the meadows and the woods. They tremble and quiver,
And to me hope comes that the seeds within me asleep
May know a spirit as benign as thou, a river
Of breath, and quicken, and grow upward, with roots deep,
That I may be too, in my Autumn, a rich giver.

THE BIRDS

We sing of Summer, of the broom upon the fells,
Of full streams, and the forest floor tangled and rough,
And giant weeds, and grass that seeds at the wind's puff,
And honey gatherers in half-hidden worts and bells.
Mild is the heaven, where alone above us dwells
The sun, ripener of berries and of pods too tough,
Spreader of foliage, leaf on leaf, with shade enough
For pungent herbs fly-haunted in the ditches and dells.

We sing of Summer, I the weariless cuckoo, light
And lovely of voice, and I the lark, singer and dancer
In the mid heaven, and we swallows of curved flight
That skim the meadows and the meres from dawn till night,
and we that in the gloomy woods, hidden from sight,
Ask and answer in the treetops, ask and answer.

EPITHALAMION

(inscribed in a copy of Plato's *Symposium*)

'O ye of human kind, what is it that ye would have, one of another?'

If the god Vulcan were to come one night and stand
Beside you, lovers, grave and wise and with good will
Toward your love, and bid you ask him to fulfil
One deep wish by the cunning of his marvellous hand,
Would ye not say: These mortal bodies that were planned
So beautifully for our bliss deserve but ill
The favour of thy workmanship; for heavenly skill
Is thine, and they are of the stuff of water and sand.

But take our souls that are so large and full of light,
And while we sleep, with holy implements and flame
Weld them as thou alone hast power, till they unite
Into one essence that shall be divided never,
With wings for summits where in love it is the same
To give all, and receive all, and keep all for ever.

WORSHIP

Good beyond good and evil, and in joy beyond
Joy and sorrow, the Angels of the highest Heaven
Behold us from their calm and rapture blended even
And faltering never. They see all and understand,
While we by passions, as in a whirlwind grains of sand,
Hither and thither and up aloft and down are driven,
Blind and bewildered, by each moment gripped and riven
Away from what our Maker hath performed and planned.

Yet in us too He entreasured seeds of His own stuff,
That to the light lean from their dark and narrow plot,
And being cherished may put forth, and in the hour
From birth to death grow up and outwards, tall enough
To view instead of part the whole, and come to flower
In wide-eyed worship – flower that death withereth not.

THE STARS

We boast of travelling to the earth's ends, souls
And of our flights in yonder heaven, souls that
And in persuasion of our progress beyond all
The men of old, new feats with wonder we accl
Not seeing, while with no escape, folk without
Backwards into the future through the dark w
That we are blind, unless we hold our looks in
Up to the high past, where the stars of wisdom

Friends, if in earnest we would travel, let none
His fellow for a pilot, but, since go we must
Upon that shoreless ocean beyond fathom de
And up that mountain where no summit crov
Knowing this night is not our element, yet kn
None other, let us watch the stars to guide our

THE STARS

We boast of travelling to the earth's ends, souls that are lame,
And of our flights in yonder heaven, souls that crawl,
And in persuasion of our progress beyond all
The men of old, new feats with wonder we acclaim,
Not seeing, while with no escape, folk without aim,
Backwards into the future through the dark we fall,
That we are blind, unless we hold our looks in thrall
Up to the high past, where the stars of wisdom flame.

Friends, if in earnest we would travel, let none trust
His fellow for a pilot, but, since go we must
Upon that shoreless ocean beyond fathom deep,
And up that mountain where no summit crowns the steep,
Knowing this night is not our element, yet knowing
None other, let us watch the stars to guide our going.

*

Later Poems

1951–1986

*

A Note on Alliterative Verse

There is so deep an affinity between our language and this ancient verse form—the metre of Beowulf and other Anglo-Saxon poetry – that it needs exactly the same intonation as that of normal speech. For example, the line:

It is not nothing to have known the love . . . should not be pronounced like a line of blank verse but as follows:

It is nót nóthing to have knówn the lóve . . .

The powerful rhythm of the alliterative metre depends on four heavily stressed syllables in each line, and one or both of the first two of these stresses must alliterate with the third, that is, they must begin with the same consonantal sound, whether it is actually spelled with the same letter or not. Two stresses often clash together, as in the half lines *Their cleár cádences, To the sún's spléndour, The Spríng-Súmmer, The Áll-Mércifu l, Seréne réspite, On the deád mércy.* This syncopation has remained one of the most outstanding phonetic features of our language as normally spoken, and the alliterative metre does full justice to it, giving ample scope for the keen resonance which can result from the collision of two heavily weighted syllables, neither of which will yield to the other. That constantly recurrent effect, together with the ever varying quantity of light syllables, is what contributes more than anything else to the wide rhythmic difference between our most indigenous form of verse and those iambic metres which ousted it from English poetry towards the end of the Middle Ages.

Six of these later poems, The Garden, Spring-Summer, Midsummer, Autumn, The Elements and Requiem are in the metre we have just described. For English readers there is no problem here except the unaccustomed absence of a problem whose presence has become almost second nature to them: they have to remember to retain the intonation of normal speech and not to make the subtle compromise which the rhythm of most English poetry demands, and which they will need for the other poems in this volume. We had however decided, all things considered, to print in special type every stressed syllable throughout the six alliterative poems, mainly as a

means of complying with requests of readers whose mother-tongue is not English and who are therefore sometimes uncertain where to put the emphasis, for in the learning of a language intonation tends to come last. But the proofs showed these indications to be visually too obtrusive, and the poems in question had to be reset. Instead, in addition to the phrases already given above, we will quote here one or two brief passages which may serve as examples:

> No bréeze but from the Eást a bréath, scarce félt
> But fírm, Súmmer's best friénd, prómises
> From dáy to dáy no difference. That clóud,
> Húng it not yésterday? Hánging tomórrow
> Shåll we not práise it, when the depárted líght
> Lóng after súndown it stíll refléets?
> Then agáin gó we in the glóaming to the cliffs . . .

> Húman háppinesses are the hálf-heard stráins
> Of remóte músic; of remóte spléndours
> A glímpse, and they are góne into the gréy dárkness, . . .

> Éven Dávid, in the déep lónging
> Of lóve, lóved not his belóvèd, sáve
> With a shádow of desíre for a shádow of blíss . . .

> Veíl of the Invísible, that reveálst enoúgh
> To hált our stéps and hóld our éyes
> Wíde in wónder and in wórship, gréen
> Béauty that bánishest forebóding of decáy,
> O Spríng-Súmmer, thy sécret is for ús
> To plúnder as the bées plúnder the flówers . . .

THE GARDEN

The cock's crowing cleaves my breast,
Opens me to the eloquence of the eloquent doves.
Their clear cadences bring coolness to my heart –
Mercifullest of the merciful, have mercy upon us!

Green is the garden with grape-enclustered vine,
Tamarisk, oleander, olive and cypress,
And greenest of greens that glory in red.
Here flowers like flame flash amid the coolness
Of the blues, welcome as water to the eye,
And welcome as light on water, the sheen
Of yellow is joy and youth, uplifts,
And lends us wings; here luminous in the shade,
Glowing like garnets, globes and chalices,
And stars: saffron, sapphire and ivory,
Ochre and amethyst, with eyes of jet;
And to the sun's splendour splendour offering,
Fragrant lilies, celestially white.
Mercifullest of the merciful, have mercy upon us!

To the sun's splendour splendour offering,
Behold, eloquent, eloquent the peacocks.
Sharper their beauty than their sharpest note,
Remembrancers of Love, mirrors of Beatitude –
Giver All-Bountiful, Most Blessèd is Thy Name!

Eloquent, eloquent, eloquent the waters,
Flowing fountains that fall upon the stones,
Unruffled pools, serene and deep,
Swept by the swallows, the swan's paradise
To cruise quietly over the calm surface.
At the water's edge, eloquent the willows
That deep in the earth their deep-drinking roots,
Evermore thirsty, evermore are satiate.
Leaning, they let down their long tresses,
Images of the Mercy of earthward leaning Heaven,
And most happy is he who is happy in their shade
On the green margin, gazing over the waters,
Listening to the litany of the melodious doves,
Whose clear cadences bring coolness to the heart –
Mercifullest of the merciful, have Mercy upon us!

Eloquent the evening, the air's stillness,
The vast silences that swell up from the earth,
And fall, floating, as on flowers the dew,
Messengers of Purity, remembrancers of Peace.
High and Holy, Hearer of their orison,
Mercifullest of the merciful, have Mercy upon us!

SPRING–SUMMER

The Creator's Hand has made holy the earth,
Printing freshly, as on the first morning,
Marvellously His Beauty on the meadows and the woods.
The Spring-Summer is suddenly upon us,
And the air, flowing with a flood of warmth,
Offers us the effortless ease of youth.

The sound of the woods sighing at the passage
Of the South-West wind is a wave that breaks
Gently, joyously, jubilantly into birdsong;
And from the green glimmerings and green shadows,
Up-and-down, with eddying, meandering flight,
The first butterflies come forth to the sun,
Tokens of immortality long treasured for this hour.

White clouds; and green upon green up to the blue,
Rolling to the horizon, rounded treetops,
Elm-green, beech-green, ash-green, willow-green,
The oak's yellow-green, and yew-green, and white
Blossoms of hawthorn; and here in the glade
Larches lift up their long pennants
And droop them as the wind drops into stillness;
None but the aspens know of his presence.

The tall grasses with their tinted spikes
Are seeding or soon to seed, their roots
Thronged with clover, comfry, dandelion,
With vetch, buttercup, violet, heartsease,
And more, myriads more to follow,
For bird and bee abundance that seems
Endless and forever; earthward now Heaven

Looks and leans down and lends itself, and now,
In midmost youth, the year is at that age
Promised us for Paradise and the Presence of God.

Veil of the Invisible, that revealst enough
To halt our steps and hold our eyes
Wide in wonder and in worship, green
Beauty that banishest foreboding of decay,
O Spring-Summer, thy secret is for us
To plunder as the bees plunder the flowers,
Entering into its inmost cup
To drink deeply, dwelling in its fragrance,
To sanctify our souls with the certainty of Heaven.

MIDSUMMER

They fly over the fields, the fallow and the wheat,
Weariless in the sunlight, swallows and martins.
Forget they will go; forget they came;
Let thought stand still: the solstice, the year's noon,
Is Summer without Spring, Summer without Autumn.

To walk in the wood is to wear a green
Solemnity lit with light through the leaves,
And to break a twig is to break silence,
Save for the murmur of the murmuring doves;
And out under the sky our ears will catch
Faintly the motion of the moving sea,
Surge perpetual on pebble and sand.

By the path that winds from wood to cove
A thousand seeds, amid thick grasses
Fallen, to their fullness of flowering have attained;
And from the hedge honeysuckle, half-hidden, by its scent
Tells of its zenith; and thyme by the cliffs.

No breeze, but from the East a breath, scarce felt
Yet firm, Summer's best friend, promises
From day to day no difference. That cloud,
Hung it not yesterday? Hanging tomorrow
Shall we not praise it, when the departed light
Long after sundown it still reflects?

Then again go we in the gloaming to the cliffs:
Hearing is richer by robbery of sight,
Ears more open to the eloquence of the sea.
Listen, above it, for a belated voice,
Cry of kittiwake, or clamorous gull,
And resonant upon the rocks it will arouse within us
A deep echo, an ache of the heart,
Human heritage from a high ancestry:

The earth is ours but as aliens there, even
When time and space conspire for our delight,
We are half at home, half in exile,
Well satisfied, yet estranged by sweet yearning.

Late let us linger in the luminous dusk:
From the cliff crevices and crannies the swifts
Out over the ocean till the eye loses them
And back again fly, fleetest of winged ones –
How keen their notes! – till night separates
Briefly the twilight from break of dawn.

Yet now is enough; no need for shall,
No room for was; unrippled the sea;
The sun, seeming at the same altitude
Through the long afternoon as if never to set;
And we, little worlds into the world melted,
Are the centre of all, and with all are one,
With bird at ease an inch from the hand,
With bee, foxglove, fern and boulder,
The broom higher than our heads, the scent
Of alyssum, the gorse, the grass, the thrift,
One with the waters and wing-haunted rocks,
The air, its larks, images of ecstasy,
Vast horizons, the vault of heaven,
And we have height, and we are vast
In them; may it the measure be
Of inward thanks, and inward praise!

Trespass of Eternity upon time's empire,
Serene respite from the running of the hours,
Mark our memories with remembrance of this day,
With its sights and sounds our senses imbue,
Print imperishably its repose upon our hearts,
That when whirled onwards on the wheel of the months
Undimmed we may retain this treasure within us,
Our midsummer of the soul, our mirror of Peace.

AUTUMN

Flown are the swallows; their flight was like thyself,
O season of farewell, season that promises
Return, to renew, to retrieve and fulfil.
Momentous, the wild winds of the equinox
Speeded their gathering and their going; but now
Becalmed, on a slow current, scarce seeming
To move, the year moves to that solstice
Where extremity of age is extremity of youth.

No longer the light leaps up at daybreak,
Mirrored in the waters that wind through the plough.
The veiled river by its reeds is shown,
Willows and bushes on its banks. To the eye
They speak from the grey silence, undertones
Gentle yet urgent; we open to receive
Their beauty out of the mist; and mists over the hill
And in the hollow of the woods heavier lie each morning.

Flowers are smaller and fewer; the bees
Are lazier; and though noon lull to security
That butterfly we say, as we see it, 'the last',
For the chill of dawn is a challenge to survive.
Slowly, imperceptibly, surely, inexorably
Summer by Winter is outweighed in the scales
Of the zodiac: see how horizontally the sun
Bathes in his broadside beams the garden,
Flooding that weathered wall, illumining
The green of the moss on the grey of the stone!

Along the top, the light in his eyes,
A squirrel now with nut in mouth
Stops, and scampers, and stops, and is gone
With a leap into the elm. Unlatch that door,
Let out the sun, go out on the stream
Of splendour to the fields, following over the stubble

Thy long shadow till short it fall
Of the wood; there stay, to wonder, to drink
The mild quietness of the mid afternoon,
The mellow light on mellow leaves
Of deepening red and deepening gold.
Spent is the outward urge, the forethrust
Of branches; in retreat are the trees, benign
Yet aloof, gently majestic, withdrawn
Each one into itself, for their Summer's wave
Ebbs, and their sanctuary is inwardness and depth.

Receive, and fear no affront; every pore
Of thy sense open: innocent of suddenness
This hour, in sight and sound and touch.
The breeze holily breaks not the stillness
But merges in and merges out,
A celebrant priest; of his sacrament partake:
The leaves that fall at their falling disclose
In their place leafbuds, pointed with readiness,
Each a chrysalis for the advent of Spring.

Janus of seasons, time's span, the past
And future, with thy two faces beholding,
Serenity of thanks, serenity of hope,
The wisdom of the sage, the wisdom of the seer,
Where is thy third face? For three, not alone
The future and the past, but the Present thou dost reflect.

Thou art, beyond all, earth's obedience
To the Command of Truth: My Mercy reveal,
Its Infinite Resource, the Ultimate, wherein
Though all seem lost, yet All is found
In the Last who is the First. Faithful pageant,
Not amiss is thy mime, for manifest in thee
Omega is an archway where Alpha stands framed,
The First who comes Last, for likewise art thou
The season of seeds, O season of fruits.

THE ELEMENTS

'through a glass darkly'

The world and we are a watch through the night,
Half open eyes and ears, vigil
Between sleep and wake, not sleep nor wake,
Not pure repose of peace, nor live
Warmth of consciousness that wells like a spring.
Human happinesses are the half-heard strains
Of remote music; of remote splendours
A glimpse, and they are gone into the grey darkness,
Forms that loom up in fog, to vanish.

Let none then boast of beauties he has seen,
Or exult in wealth or wife or child.
Even David, in the deep longing
Of love, loved not his belovèd, save
With a shadow of desire for a shadow of bliss;
And a fond father's unfathomable joy,
And his woe as he wept for the wearer of a bright
Coat of colours were but a clouded dream.

Yet dreamers awake, and the world of shadows
Stands as surety for the Substance beyond,
A proof and a pledged promise of Reality.
It is not nothing to have known the love
Of face and of voice; not in vain does the heart
Melt in marvelling at mere shadows,
Echoes, for they outline and echo the Truth.

Wisdom it is to wonder at the wind as it blows
Softly on the quiet of the Summer woods,
Blessedness to breathe it, bounty from Heaven
Its presence to feel flowing, or to see it
Run in ripples over the ripening corn.

Or up wooded slopes, amid the scent of pine,
Trace back a torrent to a tumbling stream
That swirls round rocks from a rivulet in a vale.
Go amid the grasses and the grey boulders
T'wards where it springs. Thou seest it pour
Cascading from a cleft in the cliffs; hear it;
Feel it from far off on face and hands;
Approach then beneath the precipice, and gaze
At the white wonder of water that falls.

Or stand by a lake: look out across it
And see, through haze of heat of noon,
Mountains by distance dimmed, unattainable;
Or when thunder threatens thrust into nearness,
Vivid, varied; or enveloped in mist
That weaves into one the water and air,
A world of peace, pageant of monotony,
Of shadowy heights, slopes and promontories,
Grey glooms out of the grey; then girdled with cloud
That lingers long and low between
Shimmering waters and sheer headlands,
Dark-wooded to steeps of sunlit green
Rising to ridges of rock summited
With snow, whiter than whitest cloud.

Haunted by swallows are the shores of the lake:
Deftest of bird-folk, with dip of wing
Tilting the balance of their bodies they veer
To swoop sweeping over the shallows, then up
And they turn, twittering, extolling His art
Who feathered them for their flight, finches of Paradise.
That name their kin are called who fly
Eastward, where meandering overflowing Tigris
And Euphrates flood the fertile plain,
And they that are blessed with one abode, and from the South
Come not, the swallows of sacred Nile.

Now in the magnificence of the noon of day
Orchards in Egypt of orange and lemon
To their white blossoms the bees from far off
Inviting, pervade the valley with their scent,
To the desert dunes, where date-palms cease
And sand, empty undulating solitude,
Reverberates the heat in a vehemence of light.

The single means of the miracle of day,
Sun at his setting bestows his wealth
On the elements air, earth and water,
Robes them in raiment of his richest fire,
Edged with amber, emerald, chrysolite,
Intensities that glow and glimmer, then fade
To merge their tones with twilight; and we see
Offset by the dusk's deepening, the crescent,
A cool brilliance above the palms.
Stay till behind them it hangs, glittering
At stir of branch; stay to welcome
The night's silence; the stillness; the fall
Of dew, moistening the drought of the sands;
Empty desert; orchard fragrance;
Flowing river; serene starlight.

Shadows of shadows of the shadow of His Face;
Echoes of echoes of the echo of His Word.
The shadows pass, the Substance remains.
Multitudes of tomorrows melt into yesterday
Save One that will dawn as Today without end,
Has already dawned and risen is its Sun
For him who is awake, whose heart is a full moon,
Holy witness of the wealth it reflects.
It beams forth what it sees, bright in our darkness,
For us moonlight, but for the moon daylight

From a Fountain in flood ever-flowing. In that Day
The singer of the Psalms no shadow has for Love;
Jacob rejoices in Joseph forever.

Truth, All-Knowing, Eternal, Lord
Of the Absolute Day beyond day and night,
Infinite Beatitude, answer us, guide us
Over the surge of this sea of shadows, this vast
Ocean of echoes, that on the ultimate shore
We may behold, and hear, and have, and be.



THE ANNUNCIATION

(after the painting by Simone Martini)

Holy Archangel, Paradise is in thy hand;
The Tree of Life lent thee that branch; these lilies retrieve
By Ave the scent of the first lily that opened for Eve.
Or have thy wings all our abyss with fragrance fanned?
Our Lady from this world shows ebbed, thee the Command
Worldwards directed: yet though the Summits thou didst leave,
Their Mysteries to the mirror of thy face still cleave
As had thy flight from Throne to Throne the void twice spanned.

Mortal, thou seest; and ever sight more seeing shall earn:
We are two waves of Mercy's Ocean; ebb we need not,
For the Ocean's Self hath overflowed. I, messenger
Of Heaven, by Heaven outstripped, to Heaven find here my return.
She is this fragrance; 'The Lord is *with* thee', I aver.
O Truth, O Light, O Mystery, from my face recede not!

THE HERALDS

No, never bid farewell to beauty, never take,
Leave of delight, but wave it welcome: it is thine.
Farewell to Beauty? These that in her livery shine
Are heralds to proclaim her advent: for her sake
Royally receive them; let them, when they must, be gone;
But while they stay, the treasuries of thy soul explore
For wonderment, be rich in praise for every one.
Find more to give, but yet incomparably more
Keep than thou givest, pledging it to one alone,
For she that's coming is beyond comparison.

'Heaven is here' the peacock cries, to prove it true
Proffering the full cup of his beauty in repose.
Then miracle on miracle it overflows,
And he, all eyes, from every eye his magic throws.
Marvel as thou hast never marvelled, yet see through
That veil, a glimpse, and still be poor, as one that knows
Kingfisher only, dazzling, fleeting instant of blue.

If thou hast ever felt the blood drained from thy cheek
By flight of flute over a water of plucked strings,
With surge, rising, falling, of viols, and throb of drum,
Or in a garden, Summer's height, nearing a bed
Of lilies, thou hast felt thy soul borne up on wings,
That fragrance, like that music, did in prophecy speak.
Count them as pledges of beatitude to come,
Or if thou canst, find it within thee : Truth hath said
That Heaven is within us; they shall find who seek.

When homewards after length of absence thou dost turn,
In soul then to that inward Orient face about.
The differences undiscern, lessons unlearn,
And be for home as for a Paradise devout.
Say not: 'The joys of here below are but a loan,
Brief wayside welcome'. Say: 'Both journeys' ends are one',
And count the days, for in that welcome, never doubt,
Love can, if so thy course be set, reveal her power,
Breath of the Spirit: lover and belovèd in full flower
It sweeps beyond the limits of this world far out
T'wards whence they each to other came, heralds to tell
Great tidings. No, never to Beauty bid farewell,
But go to meet her; set forth now, this day, this hour.

THE DANCER

Man's destiny is day and night, movement and rest,
Heaven and earth, by Spirit winged, by Spirit weighted.
Our bodies with the breath of life are penetrated
And limbs and frames with jointed suppleness are blessed
To run and leap and sway and whirl, by Spirit possessed.
And Spirit is Peace: of all repose it is the best
To dwell between those two Hands, cradled and caressed.
Let life then be a holy sequence, alternated
Dance and repose, each to Thee, Spirit, dedicated.
Without Thee is no excellence, for consummated
By Thee all height is, and all depth Thou deepenest;
Through Thee, who art the lightest and the heaviest,
The waves are walked on, rocks by print of feet impressed.

The swallow to the surface of the lake swoops down;
Its image rises as if summoned from the deep,
And breast to breast two dance as one,
A perfect fellowship they keep.

Thou who lovest the Waters, who didst create
Breathing upon them, and they were divided, let Thy
flight glance
Over these lower waters, our earthly state,
That I, Thine image, may rise up and dance.

O be the dancer Thou! I will but follow
Thy dominance of time and space for me,
And like the unerring image of the swallow,
So I, throughout the dance, will hang on thee,

Till when to Heaven Thou soarest up in flight
My sinking down to rest a depth shall be
In image of that Height.

Music on music: flute and drum,
Lightning and thunder. Thou doest come
In Majesty, that we may greet
With awe Thy Presence, as to our feet
These ushers call us. Sternly they chide
That first we may be purified,
That from the aimless, fevered toil
Of second nature we recoil,
Shattered by drum and pierced by flute,
From our own rhythms by the root
Plucked up, and planted in new soil.

Thou art the Way; and he that stands
Within this holy circle's round,
Infallible between Thy Hands,
Loosed from his will, to Thine is bound.

I, and I, and I, foot-fated,
Doomed blissfully to dance Thy pleasure,
From liberty am liberated,
Set free to move in the great measure

That moves the earth about its poles,
The planets through the zodiac,
Gathers, directs the winds, and rolls
The sea tide in and draws it back,

A mighty harmony ordained
To match the harmony of souls—
Lost, through Thy dance to be regained.

Thou art the Truth: at one with Thee
Thy flute the dark of the soul's night
Scatters, makes way for certainty,
Every cadence a flash of light.

What is the dance if not a quest,
A bridge, a passage, a forsaking
Of lower rest for higher rest,
One balance for another breaking?

The dancer's body is a sword
Unsheathed by Thee. Slain in the dance,
The thief of our inheritance
Lies limp about his stolen hoard.

The dancer's body a temple is
To house that treasure, by Thee built,
And blessed with many entrances
For coming, going, as Thou wilt.

A voice to the flute, and Thou art sung.
We hear and listen and acclaim;
Each limb an ear is, then a tongue,
For dancers' feet invoke Thy Name,

Their hands make signs that eyes may see,
Hands that from beads Thy Blessings take,
And fingers are in flood with Thee
Whenever hands clasp for Thy sake.

Thy Wings above are sun and shower:
With joyous purity they anoint.
The dancer is an opening flower
Whose petals to the eight winds point.

On whom Thy Name hath set its seal,
From him all movement is unfurled:
He is the centre of the wheel,
He is the axis of the world.

Its beauty sways yet cannot win him.
Transparent motion and poise and glance
Reveal the sanctuary within him
Through patterned trellises of dance.

There, at the altar, Thou art both
Pourer, drinker: by Thee filled up
For Thee, the dancer is Thy cup;
The Wine: remembering Thee, O Truth.

Thou art the Life; for Thee the drum
Beats, as Thy Name throbs in the Heart.
Its message: 'Seek not to become,
But be, in depth be what thou art'.

At every step, at every stance,
All pilgrimages terminate.
The Shrine is here. What is the dance,
If not a knocking on the gate?

And Thou to let us in art pledged.
We dance, for bodies have no choice
When souls with certainty are fledged,
And dance within us, and rejoice.

Not in the firmament alone,
But to the Heart upon the vast
Inward horizon Thy signs are shown;
Yet we, not they, are overcast.

Thence from those heights, O Spirit, let blow
Thy cooling winds, the Heart to wake,
That vision from the Heart may break,
That with it all our being may flow,

Bound for the inward Ocean, a river
Of life, poured back to Thee, Life-Giver.

O Thou whose touch set turning earth through day and night,
Through wake and sleep, splendour and peace, daylight and
nightlight,
Thou who didst breathe on the waters' face, blessèd is he
Who knoweth the wind, the air we breathe, none other to be
Than that first Breath. So shall his dance proceed from Thee,
Return to Thee, begin and end in the Infinite.

REQUIEM

Hindus relinquish not their belovèd in death,
But year after year, from youth to age,
Help them with offerings to the Holy Fire
Kindled on the altar, to Agni, the Lord
Who purifies and transmutes; and to the priest, bountifully,
The rich man of his gold gives, or of cattle,
And the poor what he may of milk and of fruit,
Certain that these offerings the after-life will reach,
Following the departed, not in form but in Spirit,
For a gift sanctified by sacrifice has wings.
And they pray: From the bond of rebirth and redeath
Liberate them with Knowledge of none but Thee,
O Truth, O Self of their selves, O Peace.

Jews make studies of their Sacred Books,
Dedicating those studies to dead kinsmen –
Theirs be the merits and the meed! – and alms
They give that their sins be forgiven, to the Lord
Praying at Passover, Pentecost, Atonement,
And Tabernacles – some every Sabbath, every day –
That their dead He may bless and bring into the serene
Paradise of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
Sheltered forever beneath the shadow of His Wings.

The Buddhists of the North and the Buddhists of the South
Deeds of excellence to their dead transfer,
And two vessels they take, one full,
Empty the other, and the empty they fill,
Pouring in water for witnesses to see,
Symbol of the giving and seal upon the gift,
Pouring water, pouring virtue,
Gravity celestial, from the living to the dead,

To increase what store they acquired in life,
That the world's gravity be outweighed, and they drawn
From the rim of the immense round of existences,
Wheel of vicissitude, that to the Centre they may attain.

The Churches of the East and the Church of the West
Their memorial stones with reminders engrave
For passers-by to pray for the dead.
The bereaved solemnate requiems and vigils,
And offerings make for remission of sins,
And light candles, and litanies recite:
Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison,
Kyrie eleison: thus the living for the dead
Pray to the Merciful that His Mercy may save
And bring their souls to the bliss of Heaven.
And they beseech Mary, beseech Michael,
And all Angels, and all the Saints,
To cry with them: Kyrie eleison,
Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.

Muslims mention with Mercy their dead,
They utter not their names without utterance of a prayer;
And they pray, standing or sitting, at their tombs,
Fasts for their salvation and vigils they keep,
And chant the Qurán, and charities bestow.
For the dead Mecca and Medina they visit,
Jerusalem, or shrine of Saint, dedicating
The Pilgrimage to them – theirs be the Blessing!
And together in Mosques in congregation they pray
Alike for the dead as for the living, and invoke
The All-Merciful: have Mercy upon us.

Could these, and these, and these be wrong,
And these, and these? Could they be wrong,
And ye be right, ye right alone,
Sects that pray not for departed souls?
Shalt thou, and thou, and thou the gates
Enter of Paradise, only for being
Not bad enough to burn in Hell?
Gladdeners of the enemy, ye glut him with two feasts:
Living complacence; and prayers filched
From the derelict dead in their direst need.

Church Triumphant and Church Militant,
For the Church Suffering, O intercede, and pray
For Mercy on the dead: On the dead, Mercy!

READINESS

Half souls, scarce differing, each his difference frantic to stress!
Unheard of themes, trite themers – O, for the opposite!
Banish whatever is but was not; only admit
What was and is and shall be; but, the old to express,
Be new thyself, by being thyself, and being no less.
The soul fulfilled is new, unique; own every bit
Of thine, have power, when truth comes, to assent to it
Utterly, therefore uniquely: such is readiness.

Then, only then, upon the sea of verse unmoor
Thy vessel, and spread these new-found sails in plenitude.
Let them be white, or black for sorrow, or as rich mood
Of soul may dye them, plain or patterned with sacred Lore.
Let them be worthy that the Wind its breath may pour
Into their fullness, to spirit thee from shore to shore.

SELF-PORTRAIT

Orpheus with his music made
The mountains tremble; he could persuade
The wind to veer, the earth to unfreeze,
The sap to rise up in the trees;
The waters, every living thing
Followed, to hear him play and sing.
But my soul from the dark pall
Of future ages he could not call,
That I might hear his minstrelsy:
The sticks and stones danced, but not I.

Nor was I with the dance possessed
When Indra with his dancers blessed
That land whose jungles are the haunt
Of tiger, peacock, elephant.
They came, their sacred art to unfold:
I was not present to behold
Those movements by no man invented,
To hear those ankle-bells, new-minted
In Heaven, resound, as heavenly feet
With rhythmic step the earth did greet.

I saw not Rama: and I missed
The sight of Radha, to her tryst
Stealing at dusk for her Divine
Belovèd. No; it was not mine
To share that beauty, that holiness,
Together my two hands to press
In reverance, not mine to hear
What made five senses each an ear,
Thrilled every tree from crown to root,
The purity of Krishna's flute.

The sacrament I did not take
From the priest-king Melchizedek,
Nor stood I by that sacred well
With Abraham and Ishmael
In the Arabian wilderness,
Prayed not with them that valley to bless,
Stone on stone laid not, that house to build
Wherewith their prayers have been fulfilled.

I saw not Joseph in his glory;
I tell, but witnessed not, his story:
His brothers' guilt, how they did crave
Forgiveness and how he forgave,
And Jacob, Leah, all bowed down,
Eleven planets, sun and moon.
Their progeny scarce dared to glance
At Moses' dazzling countenance
When of the Burning Bush he told.
For me there was no need to hold
My lids half shut: time was my veil,
Nor can I leap our nature's pale
To span the years with backward wing,
That I might hear the Psalmist sing,
Or gaze with Soloman entranced,
While Sheba's queen before him danced.

Years passed, but still beyond my reach
It was, to hear the Buddha preach,
And when he held up silently
That flower, he gave it not to me.

Of all the guests less than the least
I was not to that marriage feast

Bidden, at Cana in Galilee.
I did not hear, I did not see
The words and looks that passed between
The son and mother : she serene,
Gently prevailing, and he stirred
Inifinitely deep, by the deep word
She uttered. But I dare surmise
That wine enough was in their eyes:
Wine upon wine those guests drank then.
Could any be the same again?

When half a thousand years and more
Had passed, and men allegiance swore
To the Arab Prophet, beneath the tree,
My willing hand was still not free
From bonds of time and space to be
Between his hands in fealty.

Such blessings missed, time was when I
Within myself would wonder why,
Half quarrelling with the book of fate
For having writ me down so late.
But now no longer I my lot
Can question, and of what was not.
No more I say : Would it had been!
For I have seen what I have seen,
And I have heard what I have heard.
So if to tears ye see me stirred,
Presume not that they spring from woe:
In thankful wonderment they flow.
Praise be to Him, the Lord, the King,
Who gives beyond all reckoning.

THE QUESTION

Why do we yearn? It is because
Human nature created was,
Even at Adam's quickening,
To want no less than Everything.

But we are fallen : like viols which
Need turning to a higher pitch,
Our souls are flatly out of tune,
Whence all the troubles beneath the moon.

The remedy: O key thy string
From many things to Everything,
To Paradise if thou wilt, for it
Is open to the Infinite,

And That, not those, is what we crave,
And That is All that we can have
With Having that no power can take
Away, nor less nor stale can make.

THE MEETING PLACE

(Written on the Atlantic coast of Cornwall)

O blessèd meeting place of land and sea,
Of earth and water, rock and ocean wave,
What is thy secret, that we find in thee,
From the first hour, the home that exiles crave?
Intimate art thou, yet mysterious,
And though thy welcome unreserved we have,
We must to thee conform, not thou to us.

For thou art agèd with surpassing eld,
Wherefrom to us a majesty is lent;
And thou art ever young: who hath beheld
Thy beauty without joy of wonderment?
Our souls beneath its spell are purified,
Content with little, childlike, innocent,
O world new-born at every ebb of tide.

It is enough to cast off clothes and wear
The sunlight as we walk upon the strand,
Enough to hear the surge, to breathe the air,
To feel beneath our naked feet the sand,
To give thanks for the great and for the small,
For the vast ocean, towering heads of land,
And gathered shells and pebbles, rich in all.

A cloud hath thrown its shadow to our side
Of this calm haven; all beyond is bright:
See through the cleft, where the dark rocks divide,
The splendour of that cliff face in full light
Of dazzling sun. It beckons; we draw near,
And gulls upon its ledges, grey and white,
Open their wings and voice our presence here.

Many fly out, each in its orbit wheeling.
Their cries that on the rocks reverberate,
Unearthly strange, thy secret half revealing,
Proclaim to us that shores are ultimate,
That sea cliffs are the edge of the unknown.
But we, not they, thy secret bear innate
Within our hearts in fullness, we alone.

For man's first nature is a meeting place
Where two worlds intermingle, yet are not joined:
Towards the Infinite is turned his face,
And winged ones from the soul fly out beyond,
Nor come they back save yet again to go,
Drawn by the inward Deep. The Heavens respond:
Tides of the Spirit flow and ebb and flow.